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## **SOLDIER-COOKS WORK IN HARM'S WAY TO FEED SOLDIERS OF V CORPS INFANTRY TASK FORCE**

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**FORWARD OPERATING BASE BRASSFIELD-MORA, SAMARRA, Iraq** — Twice a day, every day, some 900 Soldiers file through the “chow lines” at the dining facility here. There is little rest for the cooks of V Corps’ Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, 26<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment.

The facility here is one of the few in the 1<sup>st</sup> Infantry Division’s area of operations run entirely by Soldiers. Unlike most forward operating bases in Task Force Danger, the Brassfield-Mora dining facility doesn’t have civilian contractors to help lighten the load. Soldiers prepare and cook meals, wash pots and pans, clean equipment and serve two hot meals a day.

But the cooks here don’t spend all their time behind grills, ovens and fryers – and that gives them a special kinship with the hungry, hard-working troops of Task Force 1-26. Three to four times a week they put their lives on the line, convoying out to get the food they dish up daily.

And they live like their infantry comrades, with just four open tents and a few scattered concrete shelters to protect them from the unkind desert weather and occasional attacks from anti-Iraqi forces.

"We're Soldiers. We get paid to do it, so we make it happen," said HHC cook Spc. Donald Baptiste.

The cooks' only support comes from the six Soldiers selected to "pull KP" each day. The KPs, chosen from three companies here, pull 13-hour shifts, breaking down rations, cleaning facilities, utensils and equipment, and even preparing and serving food. But unlike the cartoon troops who pull KP in Army movies and comic strips, these real Soldiers seem to rarely complain.

And neither do the dining facility patrons.

"Our cooks do a great job. It's not easy, but I give them credit for what they do under these conditions," said 1<sup>st</sup> Lt. Joel Light, HHC medical platoon leader, as he dug into a hot breakfast.

"These guys are doing really well. I've been to other FOBs and the meals are better here than a lot of other places," added HHC staff officer 1<sup>st</sup> Lt. Kurt Brooker, a staff officer.

After a long day of patrolling near Samarra, Soldiers can get tired of eating the same meals day after day. The cooks say they try to mix up the usual fare, noting their most popular dish is the grilled T-bone steak they serve on Sundays.

With hundreds of Soldiers “chowing down” there twice a day, the facility’s plastic tables and chairs are showing the expected wear and tear. And while staff member Staff Sgt. Lavo Smith said cleanliness is one of the cooks’ primary focuses, he added that the open-air facility presents real challenges. But its chairs and brooms should last until a new dining facility now nearing completion here is finished. The renovated building will allow meals to be prepared and served indoors under more sanitary conditions.

